From: Anthony Shipman
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/1/02 8:29pm
Subject: comment on the U.S. v. Microsoft case

A penalty is not a penalty unless it stings. The current proposed
"penalty" does not sting Microsoft. The simple fact that they are saying
positive things about it, calling it "fair", shows that.

A real penalty that would be of great benefit to the computer-using public
would be to require that control over the Microsoft Office file formats
be transfered to a public standards body such as the American National
Standards Institute (ANSI). This would include, at least, the formats for
Microsoft Word documents, Excel spreadsheets and Powerpoint presentations.

This would make it possible for a variety of software companies to develop
office software that interoperated with Microsoft products. The goal is
that an ANSI-conforming document produced by vendor X software would be
guaranteed to be readable by vendor Y's software. Since it is a common
practice to e-mail documents, spread-sheets etc. from person to person
and business to business one would expect that the formats should be
standardised and that the standardisation process be impartial.

As well as revitalising the software industry this remedy would also go
a long way to solving the problem of archived documents. It is well
recognised by historians and librarians that much of the documentary
material in an electronic format produced by today's society is ephemeral
and will not be available to historians of the future. This is not
only because physical formats such as magnetic tape become obsolete
but also because the file formats become obsolete. Even now, if you
have a Word document from 10 years ago you will have great difficulty in
reading it as current versions of Word do not recognise formats that old.
You will have to hunt around for a software product that can convert it
to a newer format. This problem will continue to get worse in the future.

In short, since office file formats have become an integral part of
the information infrastructure that the public depends on in this day
and age it is important that they be under impartial, public control
rather than be subject to the whim of Microsoft's marketing department.
I believe that this would be the biggest step that could be taken to
level the playing field for business software.

--
Anthony Shipman   Elektrichore - The muse of
als@labyrinth.net.au   high technology.